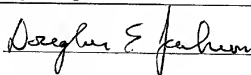


Customized FORM PTO-1390 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE		ATTORNEY DOCKET NO P07534US00/RFH
TRANSMITTAL LETTER TO THE UNITED STATES DESIGNATED/ELECTED OFFICE (DO/EO/US) CONCERNING A FILING UNDER 35 U.S.C. 371		U.S. APPLICATION NO (if known - see 37 CFR 1.51) 10/049677
INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO. PCT/GB00/03175	INTERNATIONAL FILING DATE 17 AUGUST 2000	PRIORITY DATE CLAIMED 17 AUGUST 1999
TITLE OF INVENTION: SUBSTRATE CONVEYORS		
APPLICANT(S) FOR DO/EO/US: NEWMAN, Paul R.		
Applicant herewith submits to the US Designated/Elected Office (DO/EO/US) the following items and other information.		
<div style="font-size: small;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. This is a FIRST submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371. <input type="checkbox"/> 2. This is a SECOND or SUBSEQUENT submission of items concerning a filing under 35 USC 371. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3. This express request to begin national examination procedures (35 USC 371(f)) at any time rather than delay examination until the expiration of the applicable time limit set in 35 USC 371(b) and PCT Art. 22 and 39(1). <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. A proper Demand for International Preliminary Examination was made by the 19th month from the earliest claimed priority date. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5. A copy of the International Application as filed (35 U.S.C. 371 (c)(2)) <div style="margin-left: 20px; font-size: x-small;"> <input type="checkbox"/> a. is transmitted herewith (required only if not transmitted by the International Bureau). <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> b. has been transmitted by the International Bureau. <input type="checkbox"/> c. is not required, as the application was filed in the United States Receiving Office (RO/US). <input type="checkbox"/> 6. A translation of the International Application into English (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(2)). <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 7. Amendments to the claims of the International Appln. under PCT Article 19 (35 USC 371 (c)(3)) <div style="margin-left: 20px; font-size: x-small;"> <input type="checkbox"/> a. are transmitted herewith (required only if not transmitted by the International Bureau). <input type="checkbox"/> b. have been transmitted by the International Bureau. <input type="checkbox"/> c. have not been made; however, the time limit for making such amendments had NOT expired. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> d. have not been made and will not be made. <input type="checkbox"/> 8. A translation of the amendments to the claims under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3)). <input type="checkbox"/> 9. An oath or declaration of the inventor(s) (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(4)). <input type="checkbox"/> 10. A translation of the annexes to the Int'l Prelim. Exam. Report under PCT Article 36 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(5)) Items 11. to 20. below concern document(s) or information included: <input type="checkbox"/> 11. An Information Disclosure Statement under 37 C.F.R. 1.97 and 1.98. <input type="checkbox"/> 12. An Assignment document for recording. A separate cover sheet in compliance with 37 CFR 3 28 and 3 31 is included <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 13. A First preliminary amendment. <input type="checkbox"/> 14. A Second or Subsequent preliminary amendment. <input type="checkbox"/> 15. A substitute specification. <input type="checkbox"/> 16. A change of power of attorney and/or address letter. <input type="checkbox"/> 17. A computer-readable form of the sequence listing in accordance with PCT Rule 13ter.2 & 35 USC 1.821-825. <input type="checkbox"/> 18. A second copy of the published international application under 35 USC 154(d)(4). <input type="checkbox"/> 19. A second copy of the English translation of the international application under 35 USC 154(d)(4). <input type="checkbox"/> 20. Other items or information: <div style="margin-left: 20px; font-size: x-small;"> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <input type="checkbox"/> A copy of the Notification of Missing Requirements under 35 U.S.C. 371. <input type="checkbox"/> In the event that a petition for extension of time is required to be submitted herewith, and in the event that a separate petition does not accompany this response, applicant hereby petitions under 37 CFR 1.136(a) for an extension of time of as many months as are required to render this submission timely. Any fee is authorized in 17(c). </div> </div></div>		
Date: 15 February 2002		

U.S. APPLICATION NO. <i>(if known)</i> 10/049677		INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO. PCT/GB00/03175		ATTORNEY DOCKET NO P07534US00/RFH	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 21. The following fees are submitted: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Basic National Fee (37 CFR 1.492 (a) (1)-(5):				CALCULATIONS <i>PFO USE ONLY</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Neither Int'l Prelim. Exam. fee nor Int'l Search fee paid to USPTO \$1040 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Search Report has been prepared by the EPO or JPO \$ 890 <input type="checkbox"/> No Int'l Prelim. Ex. fee paid to USPTO but Int'l Search fee paid to USPTO \$ 740 <input type="checkbox"/> International preliminary examination fee paid to USPTPO \$ 710 <input type="checkbox"/> Int'l Prelim. Ex. fee paid to USPTO & all claims satisfied PCT Art. 33(1)-(4) \$ 100					
ENTER APPROPRIATE BASIC FEE AMOUNT = \$ 890					
<input type="checkbox"/> Surcharge of \$130 for furnishing the oath or declaration later than from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492(e)).					
<input type="checkbox"/> 20 mos. \$ <input type="checkbox"/> 30 mos. +					
CLAIMS	NUMBER FILED	NUMBER EXTRA	RATE		
Total Claims	15 - 20 =		X \$18 =	\$	
Independent Claims	02 - 03 =		X \$84 =	\$	
<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Dependent Claim(s) (if applicable)			+ \$280 =	\$	
TOTAL OF ABOVE CALCULATIONS =				\$ 890	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Applicant claims small entity status. See 37 CFR 1.27. The fees indicated above are reduced by 1/2.				-	\$ 445
SUBTOTAL =				\$ 445	
<input type="checkbox"/> Processing fee of \$130 for furnishing the English translation later than from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492(f)).				<input type="checkbox"/> 20 mos. \$ <input type="checkbox"/> 30 mos. +	
TOTAL NATIONAL FEE =				\$ 445	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fee for recording the enclosed assignment (37 CFR 1.21(h)). The assignment must be accompanied by an appropriate cover sheet (37 CFR 3.28, 3.31). \$40 per property				+	\$
TOTAL FEES ENCLOSED =				\$ 445	
<i>Amount to be</i>				<i>Refunded</i>	\$
				<i>Charged</i>	\$
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a. A check in the amount of \$ 445.00 to cover the above fees is enclosed. <input type="checkbox"/> b. Please charge my Deposit Account No. 12-0555 in the amount of \$ to cover the above fees. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> c. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees required or credit overpayment to Deposit Account No. 12-0555.					
<i>Note: Where an appropriate time limit under 37 CFR 1.494 or 1.495 has not been met, a petition to revive (37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b)) must be filed and granted to restore the application to pending status</i>					
SEND ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:					
ROSS F. HUNT, JR. At the address (below) of CUSTOMER NO. 00881. LARSON & TAYLOR, PLC 1199 NORTH FAIRFAX ST. SUITE 900 ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314			SIGNATURE:  NAME: Douglas E. Jackson REG. NO.: 28518 PHONE NO.: 703-739-4900 Date: 15 February 2002		

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Patent

In re patent application of: NEWMAN

Serial No.: Unassigned

Examiner: Unassigned

Filed: On even date herewith

Art Unit: Unassigned

For: SUBSTRATE CONVEYORS . .

Dckt No.: P07534US00/RFH

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Commissioner of Patents

Washington, D.C. 20231

SIR:

Prior to examination, please amend the above-identified application as follows:

IN THE CLAIMS

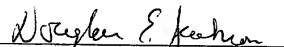
A clean version of all pending claims is provided herewith in **Attachment A**. It will be noted that claims 1, 3, 5-9, 11 and 14 have been amended relative to the previously provided version as shown by the marked up version thereof in **Attachment B** provided herewith.

REMARKS

The present amendment is made to eliminate multiple dependent claims and thus eliminate the requirement for a multiple claim fee.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: 2/15/02


By: Douglas E. Jackson
Registration No.: 28,518

ATTACHMENT A

Clean Replacement/New Claims (entire set of pending claims)

Following herewith is a clean copy of the entire set of pending claims.

1. (amended) A conveying arrangement for conveying foodstuffs including a conveying surface for conveying a foodstuff, characterized by a decontamination arrangement comprising a first cleaner which comprises a sprayer and is adapted to mechanically remove food debris from the conveying surface, and a second cleaner, downstream of the first cleaner, for subjecting said surface to ultraviolet irradiation.
2. A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 in which the conveying means is a belt.
3. (amended) A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 in which the first cleaner includes one or more of brushes and scrapers.
4. A conveying arrangement according to claim 3 in which the first cleaner comprises a rinse/clean unit having means for directing liquid onto the conveying surface and a brush or scraper such as a rotating brush roller for acting on the conveying surface wetted by the liquid.
5. (amended) A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 in which the second cleaner applies UV radiation right across the conveying surface at a power of at least 2 W/m².
6. (amended) A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 in which said first cleaner and/or said second cleaner acts on the conveying surface at a flexure thereof.
7. (amended) A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 comprising a detection unit positioned adjacent the conveying surface downstream of at least the first cleaner, to

detect the presence of any residual matter on the conveying surface after the action of said cleaner.

8. (amended) Food processing apparatus comprising a conveying arrangement according to claim 1.

9. (amended) A decontamination arrangement comprising first and second cleaners as specified in claim 1, adapted for fitting to an existing foodstuff conveying arrangement.

10. A decontamination arrangement according to claim 9 which includes a liquid containment chamber with entry and exit openings for the conveyor.

11. (amended) A method of adapting a conveyor system by adding to it a decontamination arrangement to form a conveyor arrangement as defined in claim 1.

12. A method of decontaminating a conveying surface of a foodstuff conveyor, comprising a first step of mechanically removing debris from the conveying surface by a process comprising spraying, and a second step of subjecting said surface to ultraviolet irradiation.

13. A method according to claim 12 in which the first step includes one or more of brushing and scraping of the conveying surface.

14. (amended) A method according to claim 12 further comprising monitoring the cleanliness of the conveyor surface downstream of at least the first step.

15. A method according to claim 14 comprising modifying, preferably automatically, the first and/or second cleaning steps in dependence on said monitored cleanliness of the conveyor surface.

ATTACHMENT B

Marked Up Replacement Claims

Following herewith is a marked up copy of each rewritten claim together with all other pending claims.

1. (amended) A conveying arrangement for conveying foodstuffs including a conveying surface for conveying a foodstuff, ~~characterised~~characterized by a decontamination arrangement comprising a first cleaner which comprises a sprayer and is adapted to mechanically remove food debris from the conveying surface, and a second cleaner, downstream of the first cleaner, for subjecting said surface to ultraviolet irradiation.

2. A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 in which the conveying means is a belt.

3. (amended) A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 ~~or 2~~ in which the first cleaner includes one or more of brushes and scrapers.

4. A conveying arrangement according to claim 3 in which the first cleaner comprises a rinse/clean unit having means for directing liquid onto the conveying surface and a brush or scraper such as a rotating brush roller for acting on the conveying surface wetted by the liquid.

5. (amended) A conveying arrangement according to ~~any one of the preceding claims 1~~ in which the second cleaner applies UV radiation right across the conveying surface at a power of at least 2 W/m^2 .

6. (amended) A conveying arrangement according to ~~any one of the preceding claims 1~~ in which said first cleaner and/or said second cleaner acts on the conveying surface at a flexure thereof.

7. (amended) A conveying arrangement according to ~~any one of the preceding claims 1~~ comprising a detection unit positioned adjacent the conveying surface downstream of at least the first cleaner, to detect the presence of any residual matter on the conveying surface after the action of said cleaner.

8. (amended) Food processing apparatus comprising a conveying arrangement according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 7~~.

9. (amended) A decontamination arrangement comprising first and second cleaners as specified in ~~any one of claims 1 to 7~~, adapted for fitting to an existing foodstuff conveying arrangement.

10. A decontamination arrangement according to claim 9 which includes a liquid containment chamber with entry and exit openings for the conveyor.

11. (amended) A method of adapting a conveyor system by adding to it a decontamination arrangement to form a conveyor arrangement as defined in ~~any one of claims 1 to 7~~.

12. A method of decontaminating a conveying surface of a foodstuff conveyor, comprising a first step of mechanically removing debris from the conveying surface by a process comprising spraying, and a second step of subjecting said surface to ultraviolet irradiation.

13. A method according to claim 12 in which the first step includes one or more of brushing and scraping of the conveying surface.

14. (amended) A method according to claim 12 ~~or 13~~ further comprising monitoring the cleanliness of the conveyor surface downstream of at least the first step.

15. A method according to claim 14 comprising modifying, preferably automatically, the first and/or second cleaning steps in dependence on said monitored cleanliness of the conveyor surface.

PRIORITY REVIEW FEB 2002

SUBSTRATE CONVEYORSFIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to apparatus and methods for conveying substrates, particularly but not exclusively food. It relates to conveyors that are self-cleaning in that they present a freshly cleaned, decontaminated bed surface to the substrate to be conveyed.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The use of conveyors, especially of the continuous belt type, for moving substrates through high throughput manufacturing units is well established. In the food industry, any contact between an item of food and any equipment surface, especially the conveyor, is a potential source of microbial contamination of the food. Furthermore contaminants on the surface of the food can be transferred to equipment leading to cross contamination of subsequent items. The nature of continuous belt conveyors tends to increase the risk of cross contamination, which is of particular concern in the food industry as it can lead to reduced shelf life of the contaminated food item, or even to food poisoning.

Conveyors can be wholly or partly enclosed within a decontaminating unit, for example as described in WO94/24875 (which is incorporated herein by reference) in which a plurality of UV sources are distributed around the walls of a tunnel and directed radially inwardly towards the centre of the cavity through which the substrate is conveyed. The equipment effectively decontaminates the conveyor and the substrate on the conveyor at the same

time; although this simultaneous action is often highly desirable from the point of view of food hygiene, it is not universally permitted. Further, in use such equipment can occupy large areas of factory floor, partly because
5 the requirement for ensuring operator safety often entails providing additional features.

Such equipment is effective in minimising the effect of cross contamination between belt and substrate, provided especially that the conveyor belt is apertured or
10 UV transmissive. If the belt is neither apertured nor UV transmissive, decontamination of the underside of the belt can be less effective. Even with belts that are substantially apertured, such as conveyors with belts of interlocking metal or plastic mesh, some contamination can
15 build up in small crevices that are inevitably present in practice, particularly at the flexible nodes of the mesh.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides in one aspect a method
20 of decontaminating a conveying surface of a conveying means comprising a first step of mechanically removing debris, e.g. by one or more of spraying, brushing and scraping; and a second step of subjecting at least substantially all of said surface to UV irradiation. The
25 conveying surface of the conveying means may comprise surface portions of a belt, roller, chain, screw auger or even a food casing such as a sausage skin (which may be used to convey food through a smokehouse or cooker).

There may be a third step of automatically monitoring
30 the cleanliness of the cleaned surface, e.g. by irradiating with suitable radiation and monitoring

fluorescence due to contaminants.

Preferably, the radiation used in the second step falls essentially exclusively within the wavelength range 220-300 nm.

5 Preferably the power is at least 2W/m^2 , more preferably at least 5W/m^2 . The clearance between said surface and the surface of the nearest source of UV radiation is preferably less than 50 mm, more preferably less than 40 mm, and even more preferably between 25 and 10 35 mm. If the conveying means is one having a cyclic path including a return run, that is at a stage of the cycle when the direction of movement of the surface is opposite to the direction of conveying, then preferably the method is applied during the return run. If the conveying 15 surface is provided by means having a reverse surface (as is the case with a belt or chain conveyor), then preferably, the method is applied to both the conveying and reverse surfaces, preferably at substantially the same time. If the conveying surface is displaced by means of 20 drive and/or guide rollers, least part of the radiation is preferably directed to either the initial contact point between the surface and a drive or guide roller, or to the final contact point between the surface and a drive or guide roller, or to both said contact points.

25 At least part of the radiation is preferably applied to a conveying surface while a reverse surface is in contact with a drive roller or a guide roller, especially at a flexure of the conveying surface. This is a particularly preferred way of decontaminating a surface 30 provided by a web of interlocking metal or plastic mesh because the mesh opens slightly as it moves around the

roller circumferentially. This opening of the mesh allows radiation to reach into the crevices at the nodes of the mesh that are otherwise occluded.

The UV irradiation can be used to greatest effect if it is applied to a surface free of gross debris, such as particles of food. Therefore, irradiation is preceded by an operation intended to remove such debris, for example by directing jets or sprays of suitable fluid onto the surface. The term "suitable fluid" is to be understood to mean a fluid suitable for the material of the conveying means as well as the substrate conveyed, and as such includes water and water containing cleaning aids such as detergents and other surfactants. With debris from some foodstuffs, for example sugars from fruit or fat from meat, it may be desirable to use heated water, at or above about 65°C, to facilitate removal of the debris. In some circumstances, steam or super-heated steam may be considered suitable fluids or sources thereof.

Debris may alternatively or additionally be removed from the surface by brushing or scraping.

The preliminary cleaning will do a better job the more vigorous the regime, i.e. hot instead of cold, surfactant and water rather than just water, brushing and spraying rather than either spraying or brushing.

The UV will do a better job the higher the energy, i.e. 5W/m² as opposed to 2W/m² and a longer rather than shorter dwell time.

However the synergism comes in the combined effect. Washing alone will not sterilise the belt although it can make it very clean. UV alone will not sterilise the belt - the reason being that the UV has minimal penetration

capability irrespective of energy level - what you will get is a sterile belt where there is no debris and a sterile surface to the debris where there is debris. However the moment the surface of the debris is disturbed, e.g. product falling on or across it, the sterile surface is moved exposing unsterile debris below. It needs effective cleaning and UV treatment to create a sterile, clean belt.

Since any liquid that remains on the surface after spraying is likely to absorb at least some of the UV during irradiation, which will tend to reduce the efficacy of decontamination of the surface, it may be desirable to include in the apparatus a means of removing excess liquid.

The number of jets, sprays, brushing and scraping implements and excess liquid removal means is dependent on the size and travel speed of the conveyor system with larger and faster systems requiring a greater number. In a preferred embodiment, a conveyor according to the present invention comprises a suitably supported belt, means for removing debris from at least one surface of the belt, and one or a plurality of UV sources arranged to irradiate said surface. The means for removing debris and the UV sources are located so as to be able to act on the belt during the return run of the belt. The means for removing debris may comprise one or a plurality of means for directing pressurised liquid onto the surface of the belt. The means for removing debris may comprise, or preferably may further comprise, means for scraping or wiping the surface of the belt. The means for removing debris may comprise a rinse/clean unit, comprising a water

spray assembly and a pair of counter rotating brush assemblies.

Alternatively or additionally there may be at least one means for directing pressurised liquid onto the surface of a belt located so as to direct the liquid onto the surface of the belt at a flexure of the belt.

Optionally, means for removing excess liquid from either or both belt surfaces are located between the rinse/clean unit and the UV sources.

In large conveyor systems or systems with fast moving conveying surfaces, there may be provided means for removing debris and/or means for directing pressurised liquid and/or means for removing excess of liquid at a plurality of points around the system. This might include for example two or more rinse/clean units of the kind mentioned above. They may share a common liquid containment chamber. The UV sources are preferably provided as one or a plurality of arrays of UV lamps, each said array being directed to irradiate a conveying surface. Preferably, if the conveyor has conveying and reverse surfaces, the arrays of UV lamps are arranged in pairs (the term "bank" is used hereinafter to refer to a pair of arrays) such that the conveying and reverse surfaces are irradiated at substantially the same time. Preferably, one pair of said arrays is located directly upstream of a drive or guide roller such that at least part of the radiation from the UV lamps of said pair of arrays is directed to the initial contact point between a surface of the belt and said drive or guide roller. Preferably, one pair of said arrays, or more preferably a second pair of said arrays, is located directly downstream

of a drive or guide roller such that at least part of the radiation from the UV lamps of said pair of arrays is directed to the final contact point between a surface of the belt and said drive or guide roller.

5 The number of banks of lamps provided will depend on the size and rotation speed of the conveyor system. Larger and/or faster rotating systems will require more banks of lamps in order to decontaminate the conveyor system thoroughly.

10 The arrangement of UV lamps in an array is usually linear, although curved or curvilinear arrays are also contemplated within the invention, especially for providing irradiation at a flexure of the conveyor surface.

15 Alternatively or additionally there may be at least one array arranged so as to irradiate a conveying surface of the conveyor while a reverse surface is in contact with the circumferential surface of a drive roller or a guide roller, especially at a flexure of the conveyor. With a
20 belt of interlocking mesh, this positioning is intended to allow the radiation to pass between the elements of the interlocking material of the belt.

25 In preferred embodiments, there is further provided a detection unit for detecting the level of cleanliness of the conveying surface of the conveyor system. This detection method preferably uses UV light, preferably in the range 280-395nm. Organic matter remaining on the surface will fluoresce in the UV light and this fluorescence can be detected by the detection unit. In
30 the preferred detection unit, unacceptably high levels of fluorescence trigger a response which may be an audio or

visual warning to warn the user that the cleaning is insufficient. Ideally this event should be automatically logged. Alternatively or additionally, additional or special cleaning steps including extra spraying, increased
5 spray temperature and additional UV energy may be automatically or manually initiated in response to unacceptable levels of organic matter fluorescence.

Another aspect of the invention is conveying apparatus comprising the above-mentioned means.

10 A further aspect is a method of modifying a conveyor system by the addition of means as specified above.

A further aspect of the invention provides a conveyor belt surface decontaminating unit, comprising an array of UV lamps arranged on a stand. Preferably, the height of the array and the angle of the array are both adjustable
15 so that the unit may be located into an existing conveying means or conveyor so as to irradiate a surface of a belt of said existing conveying means or conveyor. Such a unit may also comprise debris-removing means of any kind specified herein, e.g. a clean/rinse unit, so that the
20 entire assembly can be retrofitted to an existing conveyor.

A further aspect of the invention provides a conveyor belt decontaminating unit, comprising a bank of UV sources
25 arranged on a stand, the bank comprising a first array of UV lamps and a second array of UV lamps, the stand supporting the first and second arrays of UV lamps such that the said first array is held substantially parallel to the said second array, the relative positions of the
30 first and second arrays defining an aperture or slit between the first and second arrays suitable for receiving

the conveying element (eg. a belt or an array of chains) of a conveyor. In an embodiment, the vertical height of the slit defined by the arrays is adjustable to accommodate a variety of thicknesses of element, and to allow a suitable clearance between each surface of the element and the surface of the respectively nearest UV lamp when in use. The term "suitable clearance" is to be understood to mean a clearance that allows free passage of the element between the two arrays and also allows adequate UV irradiation to reach the element, and as such will vary according to the circumstances; but is usually less than 50 mm, preferably less than 40 mm, more preferably between 25 and 35 mm.

Some embodiments of the invention will now be described with reference to the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings:

Figure 1 shows schematically a side elevation of a preferred conveyor according to the present invention;

Figure 2 shows an alternative location for a liquid dispenser, positioned to direct pressurised liquid onto a belt at a flexure of the belt;

Figure 3 shows an alternative arrangement of arrays of UV lamps around a flexure of the belt, and

Figure 4 shows an alternative arrangement with double rinse/clean units.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring first to Figure 1: a conveyor embodying the present invention comprises continuous belt 10 having an

upper (or conveying) surface 12 and an under (or non-conveying) surface 15, supported on guide rollers 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 and drive roller 70. It will be appreciated that the number, position, and nature (drive or guide) of the rollers is not crucial for the invention; they are shown as herein for illustration and not restriction.

Belt 10 may be of solid construction, preferably being made from UV receptive or even UV transmissive material to improve cleaning at surface non-uniformities. Additionally or alternatively it may be apertured, for example it may be made of interlocking steel or plastic mesh.

Drive roller 70 drives continuous belt 10 in the conveying direction shown by arrow A, that is in an anti-clockwise direction in Figure 1 as viewed. Drive roller 70 and guide roller 20, which support belt 10 while conveying, are supported by conveyor frame 80. The corresponding guide rollers 40, 50 support the belt 10 on the return (or non-conveying) run 165 and are supported on conveyor frame 90. Substrate is deposited on belt 10 at point 100 and is conveyed in the direction of arrow A to point 110 where it dismounts. Usually, there will be transfer of micro-organisms from the contact between the substrate and belt 10, some of which will remain on upper surface 12 of belt 10 when the substrate dismounts, accompanied occasionally by other debris. With conventional conveyors, repeated cycles of belt 10 during work shifts can lead to the accumulation of high levels of micro-organisms and accumulation of debris.

Belt 10 continues around guide roller 30 and enters rinse/clean unit 120. Rinse/clean unit 120 comprises

liquid dispensing means 130, 140, and counter-rotating brush rollers 150, 160. These are housed in a liquid containment chamber 124 with narrow openings for passage of the belt and a drain (not shown) for collection of run-off liquid and removed debris. The liquid dispensing means are preferably spray bars, i.e. a series of nozzle openings distributed along a conduit for pressurised liquid extending across the conveyor. Belt 10 first encounters a fine spray of suitable liquid from liquid dispensers 130, 140. If the debris is likely to contain "sticky" materials, for example sugars from fruits or fat from meat, it can be desirable to use heated water. A minimum temperature of about 65°C has been found to be effective. The wetted belt 10 next encounters counter rotating brushes 150, 160 which remove the gross debris.

The arrangement of rinse/clean unit 120 shown schematically in Figure 1 is preferred when the material of belt 10 is interlocked, sectional, open grid or mesh, as it is recommended that both surfaces 12, 15 are cleaned. If belt 10 is of solid construction, under-surface spray 140 and its corresponding cleaning brush 160 can be omitted.

As shown in Figure 2, suitable liquid may be directed from dispensing means 135 onto belt 10 as it moves circumferentially around guide roller 30, for example; that is, the liquid is directed at flexure 35. This arrangement facilitates movement of suitable liquid between the elements of a belt made of interlocking material, which assists removal of debris.

Water (or other suitable liquid, as appropriate) drips from belt 10 as it moves between rinse/clean unit

120 and point 170 of return run 165 into drainage channel 180 and is directed to a suitable drainage point. Drying means, eg using a fan 185 to direct a stream of air (which may be heated) onto the surface of the belts via dryer nozzles 187, may be located after rinse/clean unit 120. The drying means help to ensure the removal of any remaining liquid from the surfaces of the belt, which might otherwise reduce the efficacy of UV decontamination by preventing adequate radiation from reaching the belt's surface.

As belt 10 moves between point 170 and point of contact 190 between roller 50 and belt 10, it receives UV irradiation from a plurality of UV lamps 210 in first irradiation bank 200. First irradiation bank 200 comprises an upper array 202 and a lower array 205 of UV lamps 210 arranged to irradiate both surfaces 12, 15 of belt 10 simultaneously. The clearance between either surface 12, 15 and the surface of the nearest of the UV lamps 210 need be no more than 30mm, a distance found in trials to be effective in terms of cost and microbial reduction.

If belt 10 is made of interlocking material, or is moving faster than about 10 metres per minute, a second irradiation bank 220 located between rollers 50, 60 is sometimes desirable to ensure that sufficient irradiation passes between the interlocking material of belt 10 as it opens up around the circumference of roller 50 and/or to ensure sufficient exposure to UV to achieve sterility. Belt 10 now passes over roller 60 to roller 70 where the cycle repeats.

Irradiation banks 200, 220 may be supported on conveyor frame 90, or either or both may be supported on

free-standing stands.

Figure 3 shows an alternative arrangement of UV arrays in the region around roller 50 that is especially suitable when the belt is made of interlocking material. Arrays 202 and 225 are arranged, as before, to direct irradiation to the inner surface 15 of belt 10. Array 240 is arranged to irradiate the outer surface 12, especially at the flexure of the belt when the radiation can pass more easily between the elements of the mesh. Array 240 may be supported on or by conveyor frame 90, or it may be mounted on a suitably positioned free-standing stand.

Figure 4 shows a particularly preferred version with more than one clean/rinse unit. Inside the liquid containment chamber 124 two sets of sprayers/brush rollers are provided, indicated by reference numbers as above supplemented with a, b for the first and second sets respectively.

Referring again to Fig. 1, sensor units 165,166 are shown for detecting residual organic material on the conveyor after the rinse/clean stage. These can be combined UV emitter/sensor units which are known in themselves. They may be positioned at Y to monitor the performance of the rinse/clean arrangement, and/or at X to monitor the performance of the entire cleaning system. Preferably this monitoring is continuous, with its output being logged by a control processor provided as part of the arrangement. It is particularly preferred that this processor is programmed and connected to modify the cleaning regime in dependence on the detected level at residues on the conveyor surface, e.g. to initiate or increase the action of the mechanical cleaner (e.g. by any

of more forceful or more rigid brushing, increased liquid spray force or temperature) in response to an increase in detected contaminants, either progressively or in response to a present contamination limit being reached.

CLAIMS:

1. A conveying arrangement for conveying foodstuffs including a conveying surface for conveying a foodstuff, characterised by a decontamination arrangement comprising a first cleaner which comprises a sprayer and is adapted to mechanically remove food debris from the conveying surface; and a second cleaner, downstream of the first, for subjecting said surface to ultraviolet irradiation.
2. A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 in which the conveying means is a belt.
3. A conveying arrangement according to claim 1 or 2 in which the first cleaner includes one or more of brushes and scrapers.
4. A conveying arrangement according to claim 3 in which the first cleaner comprises a rinse/clean unit having means for directing liquid onto the conveying surface and a brush or scraper such as a rotating brush roller for acting on the conveying surface wetted by the liquid.
5. A conveying arrangement according to any one of the preceding claims in which the second cleaner applies UV radiation right across the conveying surface at a power of at least 2 W/m^2 .
6. A conveying arrangement according to any one of the preceding claims in which said first cleaner and/or

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said second cleaner acts on the conveying surface at a flexure thereof.

7. A conveying arrangement according to any one of the preceding claims comprising a detection unit positioned adjacent the conveying surface downstream of at least the first cleaner, to detect the presence of any residual matter on the conveying surface after the action of said cleaner.

8. Food processing apparatus comprising a conveying arrangement according to any one of claims 1 to 7.

9. A decontamination arrangement comprising first and second cleaners as specified in any one of claims 1 to 7, adapted for fitting to an existing foodstuff conveying arrangement.

10. A decontamination arrangement according to claim 9 which includes a liquid containment chamber with entry and exit openings for the conveyor.

11. A method of adapting a conveyor system by adding to it a decontamination arrangement to form a conveyor arrangement as defined in any one of claims 1 to 7.

12. A method of decontaminating a conveying surface of a foodstuff conveyor, comprising a first step of mechanically removing debris from the conveying surface by a process comprising spraying, and a second step of subjecting said surface to ultraviolet irradiation.

AMENDED SHEET

13. A method according to claim 12 in which the first step includes one or more of brushing and scraping of the conveying surface.

14. A method according to claim 12 or 13 further comprising monitoring the cleanliness of the conveyor surface downstream of at least the first step.

15. A method according to claim 14 comprising modifying, preferably automatically, the first and/or second cleaning steps in dependence on said monitored cleanliness of the conveyor surface.

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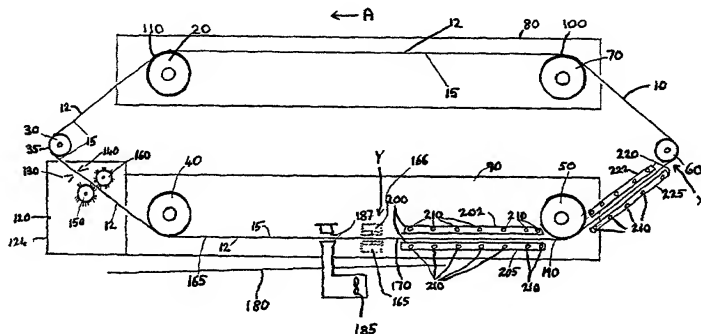
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(54) Title: SUBSTRATE CONVEYORS



(57) Abstract: The application describes conveyors suitable for use e.g. in food processing apparatus, with particular procedures and arrangements for decontaminating the surface (12) of the conveyor (10). The conveyor surface is subject first to a mechanical cleaning e.g. by spraying of liquid followed by brushing in a rinse/clean unit (120). This displaces gross debris from the conveyor surface. In a second step the surface is subjected to UV irradiation to sterilise the cleaned surface. This UV irradiation may be by means of banks (200) of UV lamps between which the conveyor passes. Detectors (165, 166) for residual organic material may be used to monitor the cleanliness of the surface.

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Fig 2.

Fig 4

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Patent

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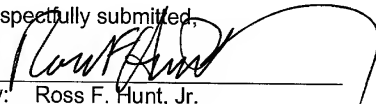


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Respectfully submitted,

Date: May 22, 2002

By:  Ross F. Hunt, Jr.

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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION **in and between State (s)**

Attorney's Pocket No:
P07534US00

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:
 My name, past office address and citizenship are as stated below adjacent to my name.
 I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor
 (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention
 entitled **Substrate Conveyors**

_____ the specification of which
 (check one) ☐ is attached hereto.
☐ is U.S. Application Serial No. _____ which was filed on _____
 and (if applicable) amended on _____
☒ is International Application No. **PCT/GB00/03175** which was filed on **17.08.00**
 and (if applicable) amended on **26.10.01**

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 I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, § 119 of any foreign application(s) for patent or
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Prior Foreign Application(s) (☐ ADDITIONAL APPLICATIONS IDENTIFIED ON ATTACHED SHEET):

Number	Country	Day/Month/Year Filed	Priority Claimed
			Yes No
9919477.1	GB	17.08.99	X

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, § 120 of any United States application(s) listed below and
 insofar as the subject matter of each claim of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States application in
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